6: Tomasic E-4 (1947-1948) 1953 RFI Great Russia RFI .

were directed not only against this cult, but also against that of the Fire and of the Sun.[25] There was no cult of war-gods in the mythology of the Old Slavs nor was there any epic poetry in their folklore.

Unlike the patriarchal, rigidly stratified and dualistic religious system of steppe nomads which was full of tensions and struggles, the supernatural world of the Slavs of Polesie was anarchic, equalitarian and peaceful. Apparently projecting their own social organization into the supernatural world, the Old-Slavonic plowmen conceived it as being composed of both sexes but without a hierarchy of power among themselves. The deities that inhabited that world were neither arbitrary nor corrupted, nor did they fight among themselves for the control over man. Festivals in their honor were celebrated with the accent on drink, song, dance and lovemaking.

Accordingly the Slavs of Polesie did not have to appease their deities nor try to be on good terms with both the bad and the good ones. They believed that after death bad and wicked people would roam the earth in the form of werewolves and vampires; but, they also possessed simple means of protection against these evil ghosts, such as pieces of torn clothes, which were accessible to everyone.[26] There were always persons of both sexes who maintained contact and control over the spirits of evil and were willing to help anyone in distress. Hence the Old Slavs trusted their wizards, the *veshchy*.[27]

According to the religious and social philosophy of the Slavs of the Dnieper, there are some general all-embracing rules of behavior to which all people, all the universe as well as all the deities, are subjected. In such a religious and philosophical system, the deities could not be capricious. They could be relied upon to behave according to commonly accepted rules of conduct and should not therefore be distrusted and feared. It is this optimistic view of destiny and of the universe, in which order and anarchic equity, not sword or might nor caprice prevail, that perhaps had found expression in the Old-Slavonic concept of law which was identified with truth and justice (*pravda*). The same view of life had perhaps found expression also in the Old-Slavonic concept of judgment which was identified with destiny

(*sud*). Accordingly, in the mind of these people, the universe and peace (*mir*) were also identical.[28]

Great calamities occasionally befell the Old-Slavonic communities—frequent raids and plundering by the invaders and slave hunters; then cattle plagues and epidemics. These were thought to have been brought on by certain demons and malevolent ghosts, but the Polesie people knew of ways to cope even with such disasters. Contagious diseases were prevented or stopped by means of magic, especially by the magical powers of women. As for their enemies, the soil cultivators of the Dnieper basin were not prepared for any offensive or defensive warfare and were an easy prey for many aggressors. Being not armed, their defense consisted of hiding themselves. They sought safety in impenetrable marshes and forests and even resorted to such ruses as lying submerged on the bottoms of marshes and breathing by means of cane sticks until the danger was over.[29]

Since the Old-Slavonic agriculturists contracted their marriage unions early in life, as a means of labor supply and since they were not exposed to exhaustion of constant warfare, the region which they originally inhabited soon reached its limits of population. Thus, in spite of their autarchic and intensive agricultural techniques and their attachment to the soil, the early Slav folk were forced to leave their original habitat in search of new lands. They did not migrate in a fury and did not traverse great distances like the mounted nomads of the steppes; rather, they moved slowly and quietly for short distances and by stages always keeping in touch with the mother community from which they had sprung.

In this manner the Old-Slavonic tillers penetrated new regions and territories, not by force and conquest like the predatory steppe raiders, but by cultivating new soil along the river basins, in the midst of forest clearings, drained marshes or irrigated steppes. Living in village communities which remained ethnically uninterrupted, they transplanted and perpetuated in their new homes their native agricultural techniques, their beliefs and customs, their family and community organization, as well as their philosophy of life. Thus as late as the twentieth century, the social organization and personality traits of the Zadruga peo-

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Tver the ancient,
Tver the wealthy,
And the two brothers,
The two bold Borisovichi.
At once young Schelkun
Stabbed his son,
Filled a bowl of his blood,
His warm blood,
And drank up the bowl of that warm blood:
And straightway Tsar Azvych
Bestowed upon him
Tver the ancient,
Tver the wealthy,
And the two brothers,
The two bold Borisovichi.[32]

However, as soon as such "Good bold youths who have robbed and slain" find themselves in circumstances which appear to be unsurmountable, they are inclined to become cowardly, are overwhelmed with gloom and fear, and tend to rely on crouching servility and on guile and cunning as a means of self-preservation. When in such a mood they picture their enemies as superhuman, beastly beings possessing supernatural strength, thus justifying the lack of fair play in dealing with them.

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It is possible that this radical change of social structure was projected into the new folk concept of the supernatural world. The Old-Slavonic fairyland inhabited predominantly by benevolent spirits was apparently transformed under the new conditions into a demonland full of beings with terrifying and macabre qualities. Blood-sucking vampires, heart-devouring witches, fiends that feast on human flesh, and other murderous and rapacious beings similar to those found in the underworld of the steppe nomads replaced the Old-Slavonic helpful deities and moderately malignant spirits.

In the same manner the Old-Slavonic benevolent wizards apparently evolved into rapacious and slaughterous witches who specialize in child eating. The Old-Slavonic beautiful and benevolent water spirits developed into monsters who bewitch people, especially the youths, and then draw them down into the deep waters to put them to death. The Old-Slavonic friendly and

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attractive forest fairies who used to help travelers changed into beastly demons who trick wayfarers into making them lose their way and then cause them to perish.

The imposition of the rule of nomadic warriors over the soil cultivators brought about not only insecurity of life and property, but disintegration of the old ways of life and of the old morals. Social disintegration favored detachment from the group, caused decline in group identification and solidarity, tended to increase self-concern, fostered destructive aggressiveness and anti-social behavior. Hence, drunkenness, debauchery, orgiastic practices, together with robbing and killing, became prominent. According to Fedotov, the old Christian sermons are so full of invectives against such behavior that some studies of Russia's religious life consider that these themes formed the main content of anti-pagan literature of those days.[33]

Perhaps as a result of such social disorganization the Old-Slavonic Goddess of Love (Lada) was relegated into the background and obscurity. Instead, male gods of bacchanalian passion and Dionysiac orgy (Iarilo, Pereplut) became outstanding in folk imagination.[34] A phallic rite was observed at wedding banquets and sexual promiscuity during the feast gathering of young people became prominent, according to the old sermons.[35]

It was under these conditions of social disorganization and insecurity, and ascendency of power-oriented patriarchal system over the old stateless, semi-matriarchal and equalitarian order that the attitudes toward women changed radically. Mounting hostilities generated by conditions of strife and insecurity can be vented not only through inordinate sex life, alcoholism and delinquency, but also by aggressive behavior against all the unprotected and the weak. And just as sex life tended to take the form of lechery, and love that of uncontrolled passion, the attitudes toward the women changed from respect and reserve to that of scorn and contempt. They came to be looked upon as impure and unclean physically and morally.[36]

It is possible that the new unsatisfactory social conditions might have also affected the concept of the Christian God and attitude toward death. Not only did popular imagination in conditions of disorganization and insecurity tend to see in this

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the peasant tended to conceive of every man as a dangerous fellow. "Ruddy or red, the man is dangerous" (*Ryzhyi da krasnyi chelovek opasnyi*), he would say. He did not think he could expect any help from man. "Do not expect any good from a human being," he would advise. And between a living man and a dead one, he thought that the latter was preferred. "No evil comes from a dead man, and no good comes from a living one," he would assert. Many Great-Russian folk sayings emphasize the need for silence, or the necessity to spare words, so that one may not betray himself and let the others take advantage of him. "Do not say every word! Do not reveal every little thought when people are near!" these maxims caution. They also warn: "Do not believe every talk, do not tell every truth!"[12]

But such a lack of faith in human beings might lead to the resolution that one is quite justified to take advantage of everyone else, since all others would do the same to him. Thus social isolation and mistrust tended to reinforce self-seeking and encourage the use of all means to achieve one's personal ends: "Lie began with the world and with the world it will die," the peasants would say. They concluded that since "Man lives by falsehood, we too should not remain behind." Their advice therefore was: "Do not mourn for truth, make terms with falsehood"; "It is by falsehood that men live."[13]

The Great-Russian peasant was accordingly often forced to rely on deliberate deceit as a means of survival in a hostile, distrustful, and unreliable world. He did not consider it necessary to have any respect for agreements, contract obligations or given pledges. He tended to be crafty even in his dealings with God and saints. When committing sinful acts at home he would cover his icons. A number of Russian folk tales are concerned with cunning and show how profitable it might be for one to resort to such means.[14] Heroes in folk epics are addicted to deceit and are condoned for their deeds of guile. Merchants in peasant villages almost invariably used false weights and measures. Perjury was so frequent that there were people whose sole profession it was to swear falsely.[15]

While in such an aggressive mood the peasant was inclined to evoke to his help the dark forces. As a result there was a great

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demand for the witches (*vedma*) and wizards (*znakhar*), persons who dealt in black magic. One bought their services both as protection from his enemies and as a means of attack on them. In this manner the dealers in black magic who were a means of protection and attack were also an added threat in life. Some knowledge of defensive and offensive magic became therefore indispensable for everybody.

Destructive urges which developed in such conditions were manifested also in the idea that it was possible for one, if he so wished, to turn into vampire in order to bring evil upon his enemies or to suck their blood. Any wizard or witch by using a spell (*zagovor*) was able to transform a man into a vampire. Such men, transformed into ghost-beasts, would then deal their terrible blows on their enemies, slaking on their victims their thirst for blood.[16]

These same conditions fostered crime, particularly theft, robbery and murder. Some of the sayings, for instance, condone theft and even robbery, particularly if they were done cleverly and the perpetrators escaped being caught. That crime was not only a means of personal gain but also a means of protest against existing conditions is witnessed by those folk proverbs which rationalize or justify theft on the ground that those from whom it was stolen were likely to be much more guilty than the thieves themselves. "He who stole sinned once; those from whom it was stolen sinned ten times." The same motivation might be seen in the inclination to put the blame on the informers more than on the thieves. "Not he who steals, but he who leads is a thief," they would say.[17] Backed by such philosophy of life and favored by existing conditions, crime became widespread. And since in that society force was identified with law, violence was often justified as a means to secure the property of others, especially in times of war. "What is taken by force is sacred," the people would say.

Since the conditions in the patriarchal family and in the stratified local community fostered destructive aggression, and since violence was widely used by all the authorities, the peasant manifested a strong inclination toward violence, whenever this expression of his protest could go unpunished. On the family